

The Freedom Found in Jesus Christ – Part 2  
Colossians 2:16-23

Introduction
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1. This morning we're going to be finishing up our passage from last week, Colossians 2:6-16 which I titled "The Freedom Found in Jesus Christ"
2. As I mentioned in the introduction last week, a common theme found in the Bible is that of freedom:
  - a. Freedom from oppression, as we saw in Israel's exodus from Egypt
  - b. Freedom from Sin: according to the Bible, every human being is born a slave to sin, but the Bible says that when God's Son Jesus makes us free from sin, we are free indeed
  - c. Finally, there's another form of freedom we see in the Bible and it's the freedom from the yoke of religion; Paul describes this in Romans 7:1-7 (READ)
3. Unfortunately, even though the Colossians had been freed from the yoke of religion through their faith in Jesus Christ, they were in danger of giving up that freedom and placing a yoke of religion back upon their necks
4. They were beginning to subject themselves to all sorts of man-made traditions, legalistic and mystical religious practices, rules and regulations, and even forms of physical and bodily debasement
5. To counteract this, Paul did three things:
  - a. First, he challenged them to maintain their freedom in Christ by continuing to walk in Him by faith, just as they had received Him:
    - 1) As a result, they had been firmly rooted in Him
    - 2) They were being built up and established in Him
    - 3) They had even been overflowing with gratitude in Him
  - b. Second, he challenged them to maintain their freedom by not being deceived about the all-sufficiency of Christ and what they had in and with Him:
    - 1) Paul warned them not to be taken captive again through philosophy and empty deception which is based on the traditions of men and elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ
    - 2) He reminded them that all the fullness of God dwelt in Jesus and they had been made complete in Him
    - 3) They had been circumcised in and crucified with Christ, which removed the body of sin and freed them from bondage to sin
    - 4) They had been baptized and made alive with Christ
    - 5) And, Jesus had disarmed and put to shame the spiritual forces of darkness
  - c. Finally, today we will see how he challenged them to maintain their freedom by rejecting legalism and false humility and holiness:
    - 1) Paul began by warning the Colossians not to allow anyone to judge them according to legalistic standards or practices (2:16-17)
    - 2) He then warned them not to allow anyone who delights in false humility and knowledge to defraud them of their prize (2:18-19)
    - 3) Finally, he warned them not to subject themselves to rule-based living (2:20-23)

A. Paul warned the Colossians not to allow anyone to judge them according to legalistic standards or practices (READ 2:16-17)

1. Most translations render this verse appropriately as a command or warning: **“Therefore, let no one judge you in food and drink, or respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—”**:
  - a. The things Paul describes here appear to be variations of Old Testament food laws and religious holidays:
    - 1) Apparently, some in the Colossian church believed these things were necessary, either for salvation or to be truly spiritual
    - 2) They had become legalistic practices (e.g. things added to the finished work of Christ), by which they judged others in the church
    - 3) Now, the Old Testament Law did require Israel to observe certain food laws and holidays as part of their covenant with God, but these ceremonial things are no longer binding on those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ (READ Galatians 3:23-25)
    - 4) Listen to what Hebrews 10:1 says: **“For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near.”**
    - 5) Paul uses similar language here in 2:17 (READ)
    - 6) So, observing the OT food laws and religious days—or even some man-made variation of them—CANNOT perfect us; they cannot make us more spiritual or more mature because they are merely a shadow of the reality which is Christ
    - 7) Only Christ Himself can make us perfect! (READ 1:28-29)

Wausau homeschoolers and their strict rules regarding friends for their kids, and the doctor who nearly lost everything after trying to segregate his family out in the country

2. This doesn't mean that things like fasting or celebrating religious holidays have no value:
  - a. We find positive examples of these things in New Testament:
    1. Jesus fasted at times, and the disciples in Acts 13:2-3 were fasting when the Holy Spirit commanded them to set apart Barnabas and Saul for ministry to the gentiles
    2. This is a pattern Paul and Barnabas seemed to follow when they appointed elders (READ Acts 14:21-23)
    3. It also appears that Paul celebrated Pentecost (READ Acts 20:16; 1 Corinthians 16:8)
    4. Finally, in Romans 14:4-6 (which we'll get to in a minute) Paul refers to some Christians regarding one day above others, as well as eating and drinking or NOT eating or drinking, and says they do this **“for the Lord”**
  - b. The difference between what we find in these examples and what was happening at Colossae is two-fold:
    - 1) First, Jesus, Peter, Barnabas, Paul and those Paul described in Romans 14 did these things as an act of faith and trust in the Lord, not as a means to justify themselves before God or others
    - 2) Second, they didn't use such practices as a litmus test or means to judge others who didn't practice them; in fact, Paul makes it clear here and elsewhere that such things should never be used to judge others (READ Romans 14:1-23)

3. TAKEAWAY: When we allow others to dictate what we do or don't do in regard to our relationship with Jesus based, on their legalistic standards, we no longer live in the freedom we have in Christ
  - a. As Paul wrote at the end of Romans 14, **"The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God"**
  - b. We have the freedom to worship Christ according to your own convictions
  - c. We just need to make sure we don't condemn ourselves in what we approve

Interaction with woman who posted in AIG facebook page and judged anyone who drinks Diet Coke

B. Paul warned the Colossians not to allow anyone who delights in false humility and religious experience to defraud them of their prize (READ 2:18-19)

1. The Greek is a bit challenging in these two verses due to some uncertainty related to some of the words:
  - a. In v. 28, some translations refer to being defrauded of a prize, while others refer to being disqualified
  - b. In his letters, Paul repeatedly likened life in Christ to a race and encouraged running in a manner that would avoid disqualification and win the prize:
    - 1) Philippians 3:14: **"I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus"**
    - 2) 1 Corinthians 9:26-27: **"Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; 27 but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified."**
    - 3) This enabled Paul at the end of his life to write in 2 Timothy 4:7-8: **"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; 8 in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing."**
2. Paul referred to two threats here that put the Colossians at risk of being disqualified or giving up their prize/reward:
  - a. The first is false humility—the word translated **"self-abasement"** refers to lowliness of mind or humility, but since Paul refers to delighting in such humility we know he's talking about false humility; it's like someone who takes pride in their great humility, or even brags about it
  - b. The second is false religious experience:
    - 1) Paul refers to the worship of angels and links it to **"visions"** seen during the experience—it's not clear what this practice was but there's evidence that some of the Greek mystery religions believed that by worshipping angels one could enter into the angelic realm and thereby access to all kinds of mysteries
    - 2) There's some disagreement among English translations on how to translate the rest of the verse (due to difficulties with the Greek), but it appears that the individuals who engaged in this false religious experience were either placing tremendous faith and trust in these visions (NASB), going on and on and on about what they see in these visions (LSB, NET, ESV), or claiming access to some visionary realm (CSB)

- 3) These individuals were being “**inflated without case by his fleshly mind**”; as the NET renders it, “**puffed up with empty notions by his fleshly mind**”
3. As a result of this false humility and these false religious experiences, these individuals were no longer holding fast to Christ, apart from whom there can be no spiritual growth (READ 2:19):
  - a. Paul wrote something similar in Ephesians 4:15-16 (READ)
  - b. In essence, the individuals at Colossae who were boasting in their false humility and false religious experiences were placing their faith and trust in those things rather than in Christ
  - c. They were no longer holding fast to the Head
4. Takeaway: when we allow ourselves to get sucked into a false sense of humility and false religious experiences, we become slaves to those things and give up the freedom we have in Christ:
  - a. I’ve mentioned many times the books I’ve been reading on NAR and the false doctrine and religious experiences they promote (things like grave soaking, waking up angels, gold dust falling from the ceiling during worship, personal and direct revelation from God, etc.)
  - b. I’ve shared examples of Hank Hanegraaff, Sarah Young, and Richard Foster who felt the need to add false religious experiences to their faith in Christ
  - c. There are all kinds of Christian pastors, teachers, and authors promoting a host of false religious practices drawn from eastern mysticism and monasticism, claiming they are necessary for our “spiritual formation”. This includes things like building labyrinths, “centering” or contemplative prayer (repeating a word over and over and over again to clear one’s mind), and Lectio Divina (repeating Bible passages in a rhythmic sense over and over again)
  - d. The problem with these things is they are all false religious practices focused on the emotions—they fill our heads with false notions about what it means to be spiritual
  - e. Another problem with practicing such things is that they become the OBJECT of pursuit rather than Christ being the object; one of the things often seen in Charismatic and Pentecostal churches is the constant pursuit of the experience, wanting more and more
  - f. This robs us of the freedom we have in Christ

<p>C. Paul warned the Colossians not to subject themselves to rule-based living (2:20-23)</p>
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1. The final thing Paul warned the Colossians about was subjecting themselves to man-made rule-based living (READ 2:20-23):
  - a. This is similar to what Paul warned them about in vs. 16-17; however, there it was about others pressuring them into practicing such things, while here it appears to be their own willingness or desire to subject themselves to such things
  - b. He posed a very direct question:
    - 1) Since they had died with Christ to the elementary principles (or spiritual principalities) of the world, why were they still living like they were in the world?
    - 2) They were submitting themselves to religious rules like: “**Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!**”
    - 3) Paul points out four truths regarding rules like these:
      - a. They’re all temporary and “**perish with use**”—remember the woman I mentioned above with her condemnation of those who drink Diet Coke?
      - b. They were based on the “**commandments and teachings of men**” – Paul was not talking about things the Bible says to avoid, but man-made rules

- c. They had the appearance of wisdom, but only in “**self-made religion**” with its false humility and “**severe treatment of the body**” (Paul may have been referring to an extreme form of fasting)
  - d. Finally, they were of “**no value against fleshly indulgence**”—they didn’t help prevent sin
- c. What Paul was describing here was apparently an attempt by the Colossians to control their fleshly desires through a list of restrictive religious rules—something the Bible says don’t protect against the desires of the flesh
- 2. Takeaway: when we submit ourselves to living by religious rites, rules, and restrictions we are no longer walking in the freedom we have in Christ:
  - a. In fact, we become slaves to those things
    - 1) The Galatians had fallen prey to living by such things and Paul accused them of being foolish because they had “**begun by the Spirit but now were trying to be perfected by the flesh**” (3:3; paraphrase)
    - 2) He reminded them that prior to their faith in Christ, they had been “**enslaved under the elemental things of the world**”, but now that they were sons of God they were to no longer be slaves to such things (Galatians 4:3-7)
    - 3) Yet, they had started to “**turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you want to be enslaved all over again**” (Galatians 4:9)
    - 4) Paul then wrote this well-known verse from Galatians 5:1: “**It was for freedom that Christ set us free. Therefore, stand firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.**”
  - b. If we truly want to control the desires of our flesh, it isn’t by rules or regulations
  - c. Rather, as Paul wrote in Galatians 5:16-26, it’s by walking by the Holy Spirit (READ)
  - d. That’s how we maintain the freedom we have in Christ